

Grabau, Joseph. "Commentary on IV.4.7: Augustine and Friendship." In *The Confessions for iPad*, edited by Allan Fitzgerald and Noël Dolan, translated by Maria Boulding. Villanova University, 2015.

Augustine and Friendship. In his meditation on his friend's death, Augustine reformulates the classical definition of friendship in distinctly Pauline terms. The Holy Spirit binds (*agglutinas*) true friends; thus does the presence of God define an authentic human relationship. Pagan views of friendship could see friendship in terms of attraction or delight in admirable qualities, but that did not exclude spiritual connection or shared ideals. Aristotle speaks about spiritual friendship; epicurean and utilitarian "friendship" is of lesser value; Cicero spoke of friendships arising primarily in the realm of politics.

Augustine criticizes his own immaturity and his failure in recognizing that the proper context of human relations is God, citing the work of the Spirit in diffusing love in human hearts (*Letter*. 130.6.13). His teaching on friendship does include a sacramental or mysterious dimension because human friendship is a symbol of God's love. In some way, it is God who is the agent who is the source and who sustains it through the "bonds" of charity. Friendship is a gift: "What consoles us in this human society, so full of errors and hardships, except unfeigned faith and the mutual love of good and true friends?" (*de ciu. dei* 19.8).

In the context of human salvation, Augustine will state his own pastoral concern so endearingly as to say, "I do not want to be saved without you" ( *s.* 17.2). This sentiment demonstrates the call of Christ's disciples to charity, to submit to the love of God in one's neighbor even when the natural affection of merely human "friendship" is absent. See Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J., "Friendship, Friends," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).